

# **PRICELESS RESOURCES**

## A Strategic Framework for Wetland and Riparian Area Conservation and Restoration in Montana 2008–2012



State of Montana  
Brian Schweitzer, Governor

Montana Department  
of Environmental Quality  
Richard Opper, Director

Montana Wetland Council  
Lynda Saul, Chair

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

BRIAN SCHWEITZER  
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER  
LT. GOVERNOR

January 2008

Dear Fellow Montanans,

Clean water, abundant hunting and fishing opportunities, and wide open spaces make Montana a great place to live, work, and play. As a headwaters state, Montana's wetlands and riparian areas are vital components of that heritage. They provide fish and wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge, and flood control, and they filter chemical pollutants, nutrients, and sediments. These areas also provide jobs and recreation to Montanans and support our tourist economy.

Society recognizes these benefits and a large majority of Montanans agree that it's important that wetland and riparian areas in Montana are conserved and protected. Yet the wetland and riparian resources of Montana have been negatively impacted over decades and these cumulative impacts have affected people, fish and wildlife resources, and important vegetation communities. The development occurring along our waterways that fragments and or reduces the functions of riparian areas is one of the most serious ecosystem threats facing Montana today. In addition, recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions have undermined the ability of state and federal governments to protect the many streams, rivers, and wetlands under the Clean Water Act, putting more and more of Montana's valuable resources at risk of pollution and destruction. On behalf of all its citizens, the state has a duty to protect the integrity of its streams, rivers, and wetlands.

The Montana Wetland Council, with input from over 500 Montana scientists, resource managers, landowners, educators, private business owners, and citizens, has developed PRICELESS RESOURCES: A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR WETLAND AND RIPARIAN AREA CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION IN MONTANA 2008-2012. Our state plan to conserve and restore wetland and riparian resources is a collaborative effort working with private landowners, federal, tribal and local governments along with private and non-profit organizations. Critical components of this strategic plan include public education and professional training for resource managers; mapping, assessment, and monitoring based on national standards; effective restoration; support for local governments; protection for vulnerable wetlands; and engaging in public policy. These actions will further our state goals of no overall net loss of the remaining wetland resource base, and an overall increase in the quality and quantity of wetlands in Montana.

Sustaining the quality of Montana's natural resources and restoring watersheds calls for concerted action. I encourage you to support this collaborative framework by getting involved in a Wetland Council working group or a local project to conserve, protect and restore Montana's wetlands and riparian areas. Future generations will be grateful you did.

Sincerely,

  
BRIAN SCHWEITZER  
Governor

Richard Oppen, Director, Department of Environmental Quality  
Mary Sexton, Director, Department of Natural Resources & Conservation  
Jeff Hagener, Director, Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks



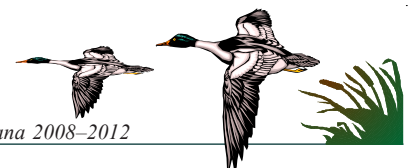
*Wetlands and riparian areas contribute significantly to the health of nearby lakes, rivers, prairies, and forests, and are the most biologically diverse areas on the Montana landscape.*  
 Photo: Montana Natural Heritage Program

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*Cover Photo: Seventy percent of Montana's threatened and endangered species rely on healthy wetlands and riparian areas for part of their life cycle. Preserving and restoring wetland habitat is critical to keeping Montana's unique wildlife, such as this grizzly bear, healthy and thriving.*  
 Photo: donaldrmjones.com





# Acknowledgements

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Montana's wetlands and riparian areas are priceless resources that add immense value to those of us fortunate to live, work, and play in this beautiful and diverse state. I am indebted to the many Montanans in federal, tribal, state, and local governments and in the non-profit and private sectors working to advance wetland and riparian protection.

I am also indebted to the many landowners who have accepted the responsibility to steward their private land and aquatic resources. I am particularly grateful to the Wetland Strategic Planning Team: Lynn Bacon, PBS&J; Debbie Fassnaught, Watershed Education Network; Tom Hinz, Montana Wetlands Legacy; Bonnie Lovelace, Joe Meek, and Jeff Ryan, Montana Department of Environmental Quality; and Linda Vance, Montana Natural Heritage Program, who donated countless hours and critical thinking to help develop and refine this strategic plan. Additional thanks go to Montana Wetland Council participants who helped brainstorm, shape, and critique it.

I also greatly value and appreciate the involvement and input from over 500 Montanans who participated in this planning process to create A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR WETLAND AND RIPARIAN AREA CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION that is unique to Montana's strengths and addresses our challenges.

Finally, I am deeply appreciative of Region 8 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for their longstanding grant support for the continued development of a strong wetland program in Montana.

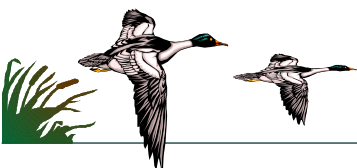
Sincerely,



Lynda A. Saul  
MDEQ Wetland Program Manager

*Public and private leaders in wetland conservation are recognized every other year by the Montana Wetland Council in an award ceremony at the State Capitol.*

Photo: Montana Wetland Council





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## *Priceless Resources*

### *A Strategic Framework for Wetland and Riparian Area Conservation and Restoration in Montana 2008–2012*



*Like so many of Montana's wildlife species, turtles need wetlands to complete their life cycle. Behind these painted turtles is a food web composed of dozens of insect and plant species, suitable wetland and upland habitat, and a natural flow of clean water.*

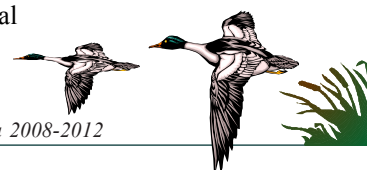
Photo: Keif Storrar

## *Executive Summary*

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**M**ontana's overarching wetland goal is: **No overall net loss of the state's remaining wetland resource base (as of 1989) and an overall increase in the quality and quantity of wetlands in Montana.** Montana has created this strategic five-year framework to prioritize and direct collective efforts on wetland and riparian area conservation and restoration in pursuit of its goal. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the lead state agency for wetland protection, has chosen a collaborative approach involving the **Montana Wetland Council**, to develop and help implement the state wetland plan.

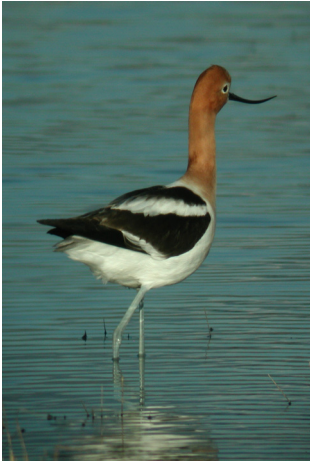
**The Montana Wetland Council is an active network of diverse interests that works cooperatively to conserve and restore Montana's wetland and riparian ecosystems.** This strategic framework identifies the work priorities that the Council can best take leadership on. Implementation relies heavily upon Council participants working through coordinated projects, grant funding, and in working groups. As a network, the Council helps participating organizations and individuals build relationships, gain knowledge of each others' work, and ensures that the "right people" get timely and useful information to make sound decisions and take informed action on shared issues. Participants include state agencies, local governments, and non-profit organizations, as well as federal agencies, tribes, and the private sector. As currently structured, the Wetland Council has no authority to take action, develop policy, or speak on behalf of its participants. Those activities are the role of individual Council participants based on their unique organizational mission, authority, or statutory requirements.



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## *Future Vision*

The Montana Wetland Council sees a future where:



*American avocets prefer shallow wetlands with broad expanses of mud flats for feeding, resting, and nesting.*

Photo: Dan Casey

- ✓ Montanans value both wetlands and riparian areas and understand that these areas provide landscape ecosystem functions, including habitat for diverse plants and animals, water purification, flood control, and groundwater recharge.
- ✓ The general public and decision-makers are engaged in wetland/riparian conservation, management, and restoration because everyone understands that human health relies on the condition of our natural environment, and we all play a part in this.
- ✓ Policies and protection mechanisms back up this cultural view, with effective tools that minimize additional destruction and degradation.
- ✓ An active, committed, and effective Montana wetland community's efforts have contributed to maintaining and restoring wetlands and riparian areas.
- ✓ The Montana Wetland Council is a vibrant and engaged network that collaborates with others to develop workable resource protection solutions to difficult issues facing Montanans.

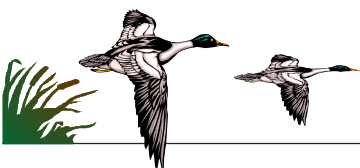
## *Five-Year Strategic Directions and Outcomes*

The following eight strategic directions highlight where the Montana Wetland Council will focus leadership, energy, activity, and resources over the next five years in order to achieve its vision for the future. The Ideal Outcomes articulate what the Council hopes to accomplish as the end result of its efforts.

### *Strategic Direction #1: Public Education*

**The MWC will increase efforts and direct resources toward improving the general public's knowledge of, appreciation for, and action taken to protect the valuable functions wetlands and riparian areas perform.**

**Ideal Outcome:** Montanans of all ages understand the value and function of wetlands and riparian areas, and have access to information that enables them to act effectively to conserve and restore these ecosystems.



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### ***Strategic Direction #2: Professional Training***

**The MWC will provide training and information for public and private resource professionals.**

**Ideal Outcome:** Public and private resource professionals are knowledgeable, trained, and prepared to integrate wetland and riparian conservation, management, and restoration into their work.

### ***Strategic Direction #3: Mapping, Assessment, and Monitoring***

**The MWC will complete and maintain statewide mapping and condition assessment monitoring programs to conserve and restore wetlands and riparian areas.**

**Ideal Outcome:** Decision-makers, resource managers, and the public have up-to-date statewide National Wetland Inventory and National Riparian Maps in digital format, and rely on a field-based monitoring program that assesses the condition of these resources for making decisions about wetland conservation and restoration.



*Dragonflies, like this mountain emerald, are important indicators of water quality and the health of ponds, lakes, and streams. Their favorite prey are flies and mosquitoes.*

Photo: Coburn Currier

### ***Strategic Direction #4: Restoration***

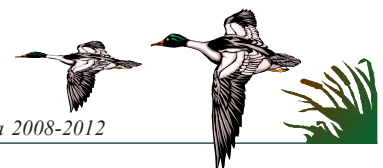
**The MWC will support and continue to work closely with the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership – the Council’s key partner that fosters on-the-ground wetland net gain – and with others engaged in wetland and riparian conservation and restoration.**

**Ideal Outcome:** The state actively supports and encourages wetland restoration and conservation. Montana’s conservation community has ample resources and works cooperatively to restore and conserve wetlands, riparian areas and associated uplands.

### ***Strategic Direction #5: Local Government***

**The MWC will assist local government entities with planning and growth management information, resources, and tools needed to protect wetlands and riparian areas, particularly in regions with rapid population growth and development potential.**

**Ideal Outcome:** Local governments are knowledgeable, well equipped, and supported to conserve and protect wetland and riparian resources as they plan, develop, and implement programs and policies that enable them to cope effectively with rapid growth and development.





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### ***Strategic Direction #6: Vulnerable Wetlands***

**The MWC will research, assess and provide leadership to develop Montana solutions to protect vulnerable wetlands and other vulnerable aquatic resources.**

**Ideal Outcome:** The broader scope of Montana's water resources, including vulnerable wetlands and other vulnerable aquatic resources, are conserved and protected in Montana.

### ***Strategic Direction #7: Public Policy***

**The MWC will track, assess, and inform state and national public policy proposals, decisions (legislative, administrative, and judicial), and actions that impact wetland and riparian area management, protection, and restoration in Montana.**

**Ideal Outcome:** National and state policy (legislative, administrative, and judicial) protects and conserves Montana's wetlands and riparian areas, recognizing the unique challenges of an arid, rural state with rapidly developing urban areas.

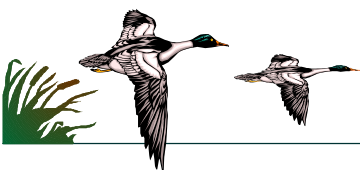
### ***Strategic Direction #8: Montana Wetland Council Effectiveness***

**The MWC will create a more formal and effective organizational structure for the Montana Wetland Council, and obtain stable funding.**

**Ideal Outcome:** The Montana Wetland Council is an effective, action-oriented network of over 1,000 agencies, organizations, and individuals concerned about and working for the protection and restoration of Montana's wetland and riparian resources. The MWC provides the statewide focus, leadership, technical information, and coordination to accomplish this critical work.

### ***The National Connection***

Funding from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants support the development of Montana's wetland program. EPA has identified six core elements critical to effective, comprehensive wetland programs. They are: regulation, monitoring and assessment, restoration, water quality standards, public-private partnerships, and coordination. In addition, EPA considers outreach and education and a watershed approach to be inherent components of all water resource programs. PRICELESS RESOURCES: A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR WETLAND AND RIPARIAN AREA CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION IN MONTANA 2008-2012 addresses all of these components.





*McWenneger Slough, an oxbow lake, part of the biologically rich Flathead River delta, is one of a magnificent complex of wetlands and riparian forests being protected through voluntary conservation easements with landowners.*  
Photo: Flathead Lakers

## *I. History and Context*

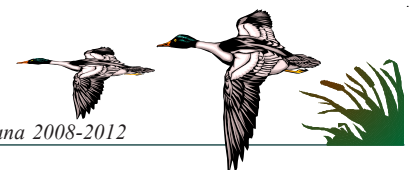
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### *National*

In 1989, President H. W. Bush established a goal of “no net loss of wetlands,” adapted from the National Wetlands Policy Forum recommendations. “No net loss” is based on quantity, as measured in acres, and quality, as measured by health. In 2004, President G. W. Bush expanded that policy to include a national goal of wetland net gain.

A policy adopted in 1977, to protect riparian areas nationally, requires each federal agency to take action to reduce the risk of flood loss; to minimize the impact of floods to human safety, health and welfare; and to restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains.

Despite such laws and policies enacted to protect them, wetlands and riparian areas across the nation continue to be drained, filled, and degraded. Yet these areas protect and improve drinking water quality; maintain and restore the water quality of lakes, rivers, and streams; filter polluted runoff from our water supply; absorb floodwaters; recharge groundwater; provide fish and wildlife habitat; and offer natural areas for recreation.



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## *Montana*

Montana's overarching wetland goal is: No overall net loss of the state's remaining wetland resource base (as of 1989) and an overall increase in the quality and quantity of wetlands in Montana. Sadly, Montana has lost about one third of its original wetland base since white settlement, mainly as a result of draining and filling. In addition, countless acres have been lost due to diminished quality, inappropriate land use, and other impacts. Development degrades riparian areas—the margins along streams, rivers, and wetlands. The Army Corps of Engineers estimates that 80 percent of all Clean Water Act permit applications in Montana involve riparian areas. Currently little, if any, mitigation is required for these impacts. Wetlands and riparian areas now comprise less than one percent and three percent of Montana's land base respectively.

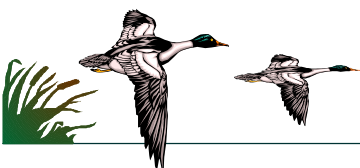
In this document, Montana presents its strategic five-year plan to prioritize and direct collective efforts on wetland and riparian area conservation and restoration. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has chosen a collaborative approach involving the Montana Wetland Council, to develop and help implement the state wetland plan and further our wetland goals. In the Montana context, collaboration is the most effective approach.

Funding from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants support the development of Montana's wetland program. EPA has identified six core elements critical to effective, comprehensive wetland programs. They are: regulation, monitoring and assessment, restoration, water quality standards, public-private partnerships, and coordination. In addition, EPA considers outreach and education and a watershed approach to be inherent components of all water resource programs. PRICELESS RESOURCES: A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR WETLAND AND RIPARIAN AREA CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION IN MONTANA 2008-2012 addresses all of these components.

## *Montana Wetland Council*

The Montana Wetland Council (MWC) was formed in 1994 following a "Wetland Summit" that brought together a broad cross-section of Montanans. The Council developed the state's first wetland conservation strategy in 1997. Since then, the MWC has grown into an extensive networking forum with a listserv of 700 that promotes cooperative wetland conservation and restoration in Montana.

The Montana Wetland Council is a vital and necessary player in assisting DEQ to meet its mission to implement the state's wetland program. The DEQ Wetland Program Manager provides consistent leadership and staff support to the MWC, and acts as a point person for wetland issues across the state. DEQ administers EPA Wetland Program Development Grants that implement the 1997 Conservation Strategy priorities.







*The Bandy Ranch practices livestock grazing best management practices to help protect water quality in Powell County.*  
Photo: Lynda Saul

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## *II. New Five-Year Plan*

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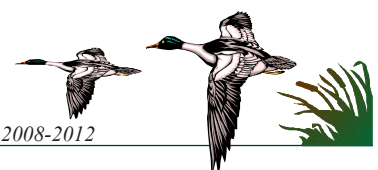
### *Background*

The State Wetland Program Manager recommended evaluating the progress and challenges since the 1997 Montana Conservation Strategy, and moving the Council from an informational and educational forum to a more action-oriented network. To do that, MWC embarked on strategic planning to focus and guide future efforts. The resulting five-year strategic plan is documented here. PRICELESS RESOURCES: A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR WETLAND AND RIPARIAN AREA CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION IN MONTANA 2008–2012 identifies the work priorities that the Council can best take leadership on. Implementation relies heavily upon Council participants working through coordinated projects, grant funding, and in working groups.

### *State Wetland Plan and Department of Environmental Quality's Role*

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality is the lead state agency responsible for developing an effective, comprehensive wetland program for Montana, as well as developing the capacity of state and local governments to protect wetland resources. This STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK documents the State Wetland Plan. It is consistent with EPA's Core Elements of a Comprehensive State Wetlands Program (<http://www.epa/owow/wetlands/initiative/swcp.html>).

The DEQ uses grant funding and other resources to accomplish Montana Wetland Program goals. The DEQ has chosen a cooperative network model of partnering to accomplish far more than any single individual or program could alone. Montana Wetland Council participants recognize that in the complex social and legal environment of natural resource protection and management, a network fosters discussion to better evaluate resource protection challenges from diverse perspectives, and find common solutions. Montana's model has tremendous strengths and challenges, and requires a flexible, opportunistic approach to wetland conservation and restoration.



# *III. Montana Wetland Council*

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## *Mission*

The Montana Wetland Council is an active network of diverse interests that works cooperatively to conserve and restore Montana's wetland and riparian ecosystems.

## *Core Beliefs*

Core beliefs provide the foundation for the Montana Wetland Council's mission, vision, and its five-year strategic plan:

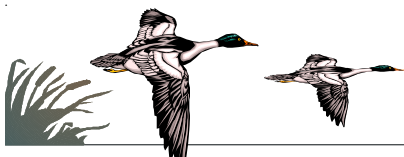
- ✓ Wetlands and riparian areas are essential to maintain water quantity and clean water quality in Montana.
- ✓ Sound science must be the basis for wetland and riparian management, conservation, restoration, policy decisions, and public education.
- ✓ The state of Montana has a responsibility to safeguard its wetlands and riparian ecosystems.
- ✓ Healthy wetland and riparian communities sustain healthy human communities.
- ✓ Montana's current landowners, land managers, and the public are the stewards of wetland, riparian, and water resources for future generations.
- ✓ An informed and engaged public is essential to wetland and riparian protection and conservation.
- ✓ Open, informed communication and cooperation among all interested parties are essential ingredients for sound management of wetland and riparian ecosystems.

## *Structure and Role*

The Montana Wetland Council welcomes participation by all entities with an interest in wetland and riparian protection, restoration, management, regulation, education, science, or other aspects of wetland resources. MWC meets three times a year in Helena, and administers the annual Wetland Stewardship Awards ceremony to recognize outstanding wetland/riparian conservation work in Montana.

As a network, the Council helps participating organizations and individuals build relationships, gain knowledge of each others' work, and ensures that the "right people" get timely and useful information to make sound decisions and take informed action on shared issues. Participants include state agencies, local governments, and non-profit organizations, as well as federal agencies, tribes, and the private sector.

Within the current structure of this STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK, the Wetland Council has no authority to take action, develop policy, or speak on behalf of participants. Those activities are the role of individual Council participants based on their unique organizational mission, authority, or statutory requirements.



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*Priceless Resources:*



*Teachers learn how to bring local wetland knowledge into the classroom at a Wonders of Wetlands teacher workshop near Hardin.*

Photo: Montana Watercourse

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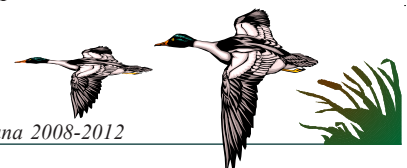
## *IV. Vision for the Future*

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The Montana Wetland Council's vision for the future sees Montana as a place where wetlands and riparian areas are restored to healthy, fully functioning ecosystems that have long-term protection. Our measures of success are a net gain of wetlands by both acreage and function, and riparian areas that are protected and restored to natural functions and processes.

We, the Montana Wetland Council, see a future where:

- Montanans value both wetlands and riparian areas and understand that these areas provide landscape ecosystem functions, including habitat for diverse plants and animals, water purification, flood control, and groundwater recharge.
- The general public and decision-makers are engaged in wetland/ riparian conservation, management, and restoration because everyone understands that human health relies on the condition of our natural environment, and we all play a part in this.
- Policies and protection mechanisms back up this cultural view, with effective tools that minimize additional destruction and degradation.
- An active, committed, and effective Montana wetland community's efforts have contributed to maintaining and restoring wetlands and riparian areas.
- The Montana Wetland Council is a vibrant and engaged network that collaborates with others to develop workable resource protection solutions to difficult issues facing Montanans.





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*Duckweed, water-sliders,  
snails, algae and  
Bozeman third graders –  
a wild splash into the  
biodiversity of pond life.*  
Photo: Montana  
Watercourse



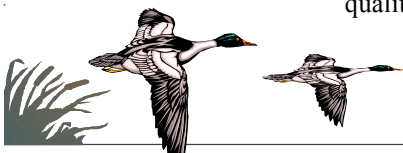
## *V. Five Year Strategic Directions*

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### *Overview*

The Montana Wetland Council is committed to participatory planning, and created a Strategic Planning Team of key wetland players to lead the process (see Appendix A). We engaged a diverse set of stakeholders via numerous channels, including telephone interviews, agriculture newspaper ads, over 360 e-mail surveys, a day-long Wetland Council meeting involving 75 participants, and a two-day planning retreat that included 30 leaders in wetland/riparian science and management. Our goal was to learn, from diverse perspectives, about the opportunities and challenges to wetland and riparian conservation and restoration in Montana, and determine how the MWC could best contribute to this important work over the next five years.

As a result of the strategic planning outreach, 300 individuals asked to be added to the Council's e-mail listserv. Currently, over 700 individuals participate on the Council's listserv, representing the following categories: consultants, federal agencies, local government, state agencies, tribes, university, and other. "Other" is the largest and most diverse category (170 individuals) that includes agriculture and irrigation interests, builders, biology-based and environment-based conservation groups, land trusts, mining and other industries, real estate development, recreation/sportsmen, water/wetland education organizations, and wood products. "Local government" is the other extensive category (160 individuals). It includes conservation district representatives, county commissioners, floodplain administrators, mayors, mosquito control districts, land-use planners, and water quality protection districts.



*Priceless Resources:*

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### ***Focused Action***

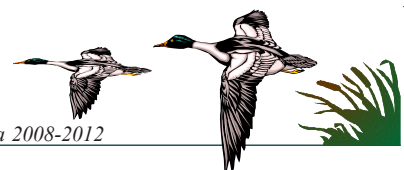
This document defines the Montana Wetland Council's focus for the next five years. The Strategic Planning Team worked hard to limit the scope to areas where the MWC could be most effective and take leadership. In order to realize our ambitious aims, MWC's participants must actively implement the actions outlined in this STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK.

The following eight strategic directions highlight where the Montana Wetland Council will focus leadership, energy, activity, and resources over the next five years in order to achieve our vision for the future.



*Bird-watching is the number one, fastest growing outdoor recreational pursuit in the United States.*

Photo: Lynda Saul





*Montanans of all ages  
enjoy learning about  
healthy wetlands, the value  
of wetland habitat to  
wildlife, and experiencing  
the outdoors first hand.*

Photo: Montana Wetlands

Legacy Partnership



### ***Strategic Direction #1: Public Education***

**The MWC will increase efforts and direct resources toward improving the general public’s knowledge of, appreciation for, and action taken to protect the valuable functions wetlands and riparian areas perform.**

*Wetland and riparian areas provide myriad valuable services to society, such as protecting surface and groundwater quality and quantity, enhancing flood control, reducing erosion, providing wildlife habitat, and offering recreational and aesthetic appreciation. Thoughtful protection and stewardship by citizens, landowners, and decision-makers must be based on accurate, science-based information, an understanding of the importance of wetland and riparian areas, and knowledge of the tools available to enable action. For over 10 years, various educational entities have produced outreach information and targeted workshops to help all Montanans understand and value wetlands and riparian areas. However, it is a relatively new and constantly evolving field; increased development pressures now make outreach more important than ever.*

**Ideal Outcome: Montanans of all ages understand the value and function of wetlands and riparian areas, and have access to information that enables them to act effectively to conserve and restore these ecosystems.**

To achieve this outcome, Montana Wetland Council participants will:

- A. Assist MWC partner organizations by supporting the development of a science-based information campaign to deliver the message that wetlands and riparian areas are an important and valuable—but diminishing—resource. All educational programs supported by the MWC will show Montanans how to take action to protect wetlands and/or riparian areas. This work must be creative in its approach, tailored to different age groups and audiences, be cost effective, and use a variety of delivery methods and venues.



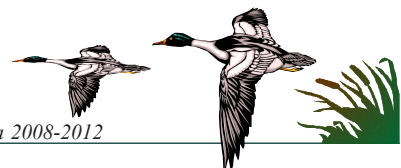
*Priceless Resources:*

- B. Expand and enhance the Montana Wetland Information Clearinghouse website and networking function by significantly upgrading the website to include information on the ecological, economic, and social value of wetland/riparian areas; wetland and riparian mapping and assessment monitoring data; regulatory, enforcement, and mitigation policy and actions; and information about the Montana Wetland Council's services and publications, i.e. wetland grants, training materials, publications, and other information. The Clearinghouse website should be the portal for wetland and riparian area information in Montana, with links to other key sites.
- C. Support DEQ to hire a Wetland Education Specialist in the Wetland Program to integrate wetland and riparian conservation and restoration within state and federal Clean Water Act programs; provide information and outreach support to local governments; seek out and engage in serendipitous outreach opportunities; and coordinate and complement other educational entities such as Montana Watercourse, local water quality districts, Montana Audubon, Watershed Education Network, Governor's Task Force for Riparian Protection, Montana Natural Heritage Program, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Interagency Riparian Cadre, and others.
- D. Create a scientific advisory committee to ensure scientific accuracy and consistency in all marketing, educational/outreach, and training materials that are developed with the support of the MWC.



*Middle school students from the Rocky Mountain Front enjoy learning about beaver ponds and beaver ecology as part of the 2007 Water Summit.*  
Photo: Montana Watercourse

*Do you remember the amazing things you saw the first time you looked into pond water teeming with life?*  
Photo: Montana Watercourse





*Ongoing professional training is crucial to maintaining an effective wetland management program for Montana.*

Photo: Lynda Saul



### ***Strategic Direction #2: Professional Training***

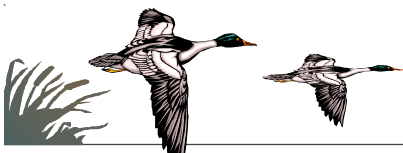
**The MWC will provide training and information for public and private resource professionals.**

*Land-use decision-makers, as well as public and private resource professionals, need additional education and training to integrate wetland and riparian conservation, management, and restoration into their communities and their work.*

**Ideal Outcome: Public and private resource professionals are knowledgeable, trained, and prepared to integrate wetland and riparian conservation, management, and restoration into their work.**

To achieve this outcome, Montana Wetland Council participants will:

- A. Create and provide two training workshops per year to federal, tribal, state, and local government agency staff and other resource professionals. Workshops should include material on wetland and riparian identification (including isolated and headwater wetlands), mapping, assessment, regulations, protection, management, and restoration. When possible, link these workshops to existing conferences and meetings such as the annual meetings of the Montana Association of Floodplain Managers, Montana Association of Planners, Montana Association of Conservation Districts, and Montana Watershed Coordination Council.
- B. Encourage attendance and provide scholarships for resource professionals to attend regional and national wetland and riparian area workshops, conferences, and training on a wide range of issues, including restoration and protection, management, monitoring, mitigation, education/outreach, regulatory/legal, delineation, and other appropriate topics.

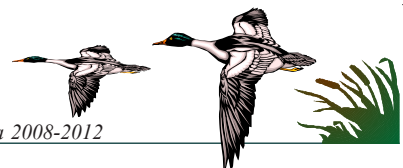


*Priceless Resources:*

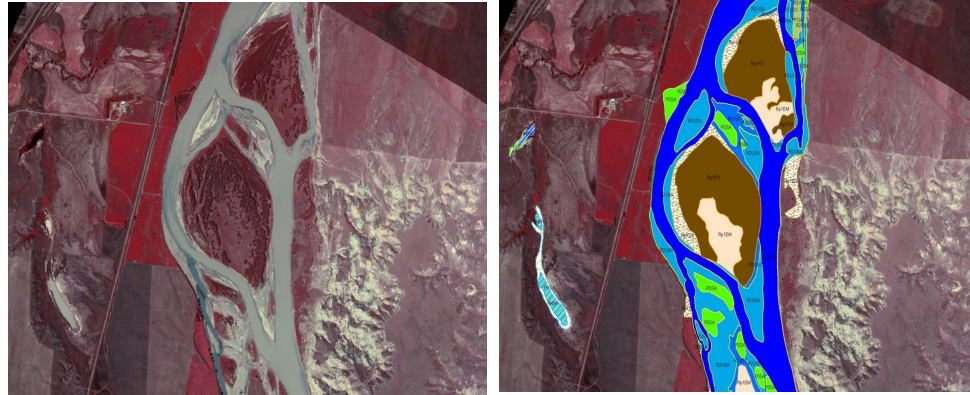
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- C. Provide technical assistance to ensure that wetland and riparian maps, reference conditions, and monitoring and assessment data are readily available to federal, tribal, state, and local resource professionals to help them make informed, science-based management decisions about wetland and riparian area protection and restoration.
  - D. Recruit and support Montana to host national or regional trainings, conferences, and workshops for wetland and riparian professional development.



*Elephanthead, a wetland obligate found in wet meadows of western Montana. Over 2,300 plant species have been identified in Montana and over half of these are found in the state's wetlands and riparian areas.*  
Photo: Lynda Saul



Color infrared aerial photography is the foundation for mapping wetlands and riparian habitat. National standards are used to create maps for Montana as part of the National Wetland Inventory. At right, the Yellowstone River downstream of Glendive. Photos: Montana Natural Heritage Program



### ***Strategic Direction #3: Mapping, Assessment, and Monitoring***

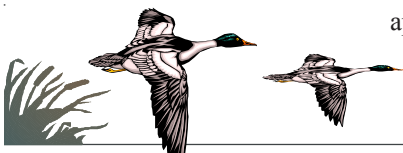
**The MWC will complete and maintain statewide mapping and condition assessment monitoring programs to conserve and restore wetlands and riparian areas.**

*Montana has made significant strides in wetland and riparian mapping in the last decade, yet mapping is still incomplete for the state. Because of our large land mass and limited resources, wetland monitoring and condition assessments have been carried out on a limited and sporadic basis. The state does not have the data it needs to determine wetland location, condition, or health. Efforts are complicated by the fact that wetlands, rivers, and streams are dynamic systems across space and time, and respond to drought, flooding, and water use. This lack of information hampers conservation and restoration efforts at the state and local levels. Mapping and condition assessment must be coordinated statewide, and be readily available and easily combined with other environmental and geographical information. Additional funding and agency coordination is needed to completely map, inventory, classify, evaluate, and make accessible the information about wetlands and riparian areas, and prioritize protection and restoration efforts. Since 1997, wetlands have become one of Montana's 13 official priority-data layers as defined by the Montana Land Information Advisory Council, a Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center has been established at the Montana Natural Heritage Program, and rapid assessments of wetland conditions performed at over 3,000 sites are available in a linked database.*

**Ideal Outcome: Decision-makers, resource managers, and the public have up-to-date statewide National Wetland Inventory and National Riparian Maps in digital format, and rely on a field-based monitoring program that assesses the condition of these resources for making decisions about wetland conservation and restoration.**

To achieve this outcome, Montana Wetland Council participants will:

- A. Support mapping and inventory projects and direct them to the Montana Natural Heritage Program's Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center. Work with the Montana Land Information Advisory Council to complete the Wetland Data Theme as one of 13 official priority-data layers for Montana's Spatial Data Infrastructure. Provide information about wetland/riparian map limitations and appropriate uses to state and local decision-makers and resource managers.



*Priceless Resources:*

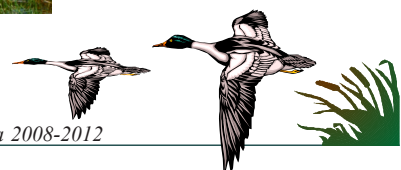


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- B. Track wetland and riparian loss and gain by type and function in the rapidly developing areas of the state, to determine if Montana is meeting its overarching goals of “no net loss” and “net gain.” Use this information to assess where and why losses and gains are occurring, and track the causes of wetland and riparian change. Recommend policies and program modifications that ensure Montana is meeting its state goal and national responsibility for no net loss and net gain.
  - C. Coordinate wetland and riparian mapping information with Department of Natural Resources and Conservation floodplain mapping, and support channel migration and floodplain inundation studies for Montana’s rivers and streams.
  - D. Encourage the Montana Natural Heritage Program to create a statewide reference network of wetland/riparian areas that reflects all resource types in all eco-regions, with the full range of conditions from unimpaired to degraded. Provide access to the reference network and supporting information through the Wetland Information Clearinghouse.
  - E. Urge wetland scientists and agencies with monitoring and assessment responsibilities to work with the Montana Natural Heritage Program to develop a strategy, tools, and schedule to implement a statewide wetland condition monitoring and assessment program. This will be based on EPA’s recommended elements. Incorporate monitoring and assessment information into the Wetland Information Clearinghouse.
  - F. Initiate efforts and methods to evaluate the impact that climate change, drought, and changing water supply have on the functioning and ecological integrity of wetlands and riparian areas.



*These researchers are sampling amphibian larvae through dipnetting near Perma on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Data collection is an important part of assessing wetland health.*

Photo: Kirwin Werner





*Montana Conservation  
Corps crew members  
transplanting wetland  
vegetation sod mats to  
revegetate a newly restored  
wetland area west of  
Manhattan.*

Photo: Montana Wetlands  
Legacy Partnership

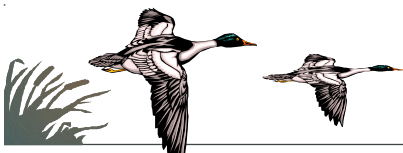


#### ***Strategic Direction #4: Restoration***

**The MWC will support and continue to work closely with the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership—the Council’s key partner that fosters on-the-ground wetland net gain—and with others engaged in wetland and riparian conservation and restoration.**

*In 2000, the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership was created to meet the Montana Wetland Council’s 1997 conservation strategy priority to encourage voluntary conservation and restoration on private and public land. The Legacy Partnership is a voluntary, collaborative partnership of over 50 organizations and agencies. The Legacy Partnership fosters on-the-ground wetland net gain, focusing on ecological integrity and wetland quality. Through incentive-based technical and financial assistance, Legacy Partners have restored and protected thousands of acres of wetlands, riparian areas, and associated uplands. The MWC also supports other landowners, organizations, and agencies engaged in on-the-ground wetland and riparian conservation and restoration.*

**Ideal Outcome: The state actively supports and encourages wetland restoration and conservation. Montana’s conservation community has ample resources and works cooperatively to restore and conserve wetlands, riparian areas, and associated uplands.**



*Priceless Resources:*

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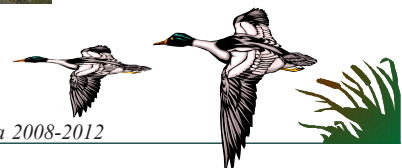
To achieve this outcome, Montana Wetland Council participants will:

- A. Support the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership by:
  - ✓ Participating in the Legacy’s mission and capacity building.
  - ✓ Collaborating with all entities to identify priority conservation areas and focusing restoration efforts on those areas.
  - ✓ Developing an active wetland restoration program on state-owned lands.
  - ✓ Creating a wetland, stream, and other aquatic natural resource mitigation crediting program.
  - ✓ Encouraging participation in the Legacy’s restoration tracking database.
  - ✓ Securing a sustainable funding base for the Legacy Partnership and its work.
- B. Support and encourage the work of all agencies, conservation organizations, and individual landowners engaged in restoration projects, and provide public outreach on the benefits of and opportunities for wetland and riparian restoration on private land.
- C. Document protection of wetlands and riparian areas in the conservation easement dataset housed in the Montana Natural Heritage Program’s Stewardship database.
- D. Evaluate the longer-term success and ecological effectiveness of restoration and compensatory mitigation in Montana.
- E. Develop, publish, and distribute a wetland and riparian restoration handbook for landowners and resource professionals who focus on restoration techniques such as project planning, site assessment, restoration design, project implementation and monitoring, and management.



*Successful wetland/riparian restoration projects require three primary ingredients: landowner commitment, a diverse group of project partners, and sites that will provide ecological benefits once restored.*

Photo: Lynda Saul





*Wetlands serve many functions on the landscape, including reducing flood damage. Restoration of high-functioning wetlands that store high runoff in the Yellowstone Valley would reduce flood damage to land and property such as seen in this photo from 1996.*  
Photo: Duncan Patten



### ***Strategic Direction #5: Local Government***

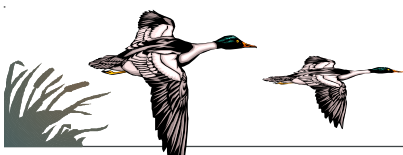
**The MWC will assist local government entities with planning and growth management information, resources, and tools needed to protect wetlands and riparian areas, particularly in regions with rapid population growth and development potential.**

*Western and southwestern Montana are experiencing rapid growth, particularly on lands that surround urban areas. A number of critical decisions that have impacts on wetlands and riparian areas are made by local government officials who often lack regulatory tools and sufficient information about resources and protection options. The Council will expand its education and technical assistance to local governments in order to improve the decisions that influence the long-term health and protection of wetlands and riparian areas. In addition, MWC will act as an information clearinghouse, and encourage Council participants and their agencies and organizations to get more involved at the local level.*

**Ideal Outcome: Local governments are knowledgeable, well equipped, and supported to conserve and protect wetland and riparian resources as they plan, develop, and implement programs and policies that enable them to cope effectively with rapid growth and development.**

To achieve this outcome, Montana Wetland Council participants will:

- A. Research, develop, and distribute model regulations, aquatic setbacks, and planning ordinances that can readily be used by local officials to conserve and protect wetland and riparian resources.

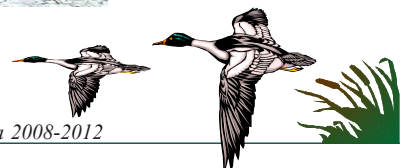


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- B. Research, compile, and distribute model Best Management Practices, economic incentive information, and other creative mechanisms that can be used for wetland and riparian protection, including isolated and headwater wetlands. As an example, identify specific ways that aquatic protection can be considered a site amenity when planning subdivisions and other developments. Publicize local government and private projects that demonstrate effective wetland/riparian protection and conservation approaches as models for others to follow.
  - C. Assess the effectiveness and challenges of model regulations, planning ordinances, Best Management Practices, incentives, and pilot projects in order to continually improve upon these tools and to share lessons learned by Montana communities and other states.
  - D. Provide training workshops and on-site technical assistance to local governments that express interest in employing any of the regulations, models, practices, and incentives discussed above.
  - E. Coordinate and support other local entities and organizations such as watershed groups, conservation districts, and conservation and sportsmen's organizations, to engage the public in local decision-making for wetland and riparian protection.
  - F. Identify and help create financial support for local government entities interested in wetland and riparian conservation and restoration, particularly in areas of rapid growth and development.



*One of the most serious ecosystem threats facing Montana today is the development occurring along our waterways that fragments or reduces the functions of riparian areas.*

Photo: Karl Christians





*Rock Creek, east of Fort Peck Lake in Valley County, is a good example of a prairie stream that provides important breeding habitat for northern leopard frogs and Great Plains toads.*  
Photo: Kirwin Werner

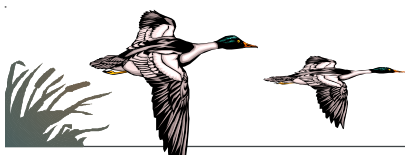


### ***Strategic Direction #6: Vulnerable Wetlands***

**The MWC will research, assess, and provide leadership to develop Montana solutions to protect vulnerable wetlands and other vulnerable aquatic resources.**

*Montanans value wetlands and riparian areas, yet the state has no specific wetland protection statute. Federal protection for isolated and headwater wetlands has diminished dramatically in recent years, leaving these aquatic resources vulnerable to impacts and outright destruction. Isolated and headwater wetlands, as well as other vulnerable aquatic resources such as intermittent and ephemeral streams, provide enormous benefits to Montanans. These direct benefits are for wildlife habitat, flood storage, erosion reduction, groundwater recharge, and filtering excess nutrients and other pollutants from our water supply. It is important to our quality of life that these areas are afforded the same level of protection and management as non-isolated wetlands and perennial water resources. In light of diminished federal protection, the Montana Wetland Council is uniquely positioned to engage its diverse participants in developing Montana solutions to protect the broader scope of Montana's water resources.*

**Ideal Outcome: The broader scope of Montana's water resources, including vulnerable wetlands and other vulnerable aquatic resources, are conserved and protected in Montana.**



*Priceless Resources:*

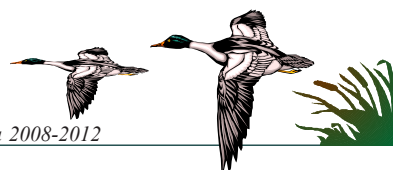
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To achieve this outcome, Montana Wetland Council participants will:

- A. Create, distribute, and publicize a “white paper” on the value and status of vulnerable wetlands and other vulnerable aquatic resources; and evaluate different ways to protect these vulnerable wetlands and aquatic resources, and if and how these approaches might work if implemented in Montana.
- B. Coordinate and organize interested participants to develop Montana solutions to fill the federal gaps in protection for vulnerable wetlands and other vulnerable aquatic resources.
- C. Provide information on the Clean Water Act to interested participants in order for them to engage in discussion and actions to protect vulnerable wetlands and other vulnerable aquatic resources.
- D. Work with entities such as the Governor’s Task Force on Riparian Protection to educate others about the importance of wetlands, riparian areas, and headwater streams for water quality and water quantity protection.
- E. Highlight the critical role vulnerable wetlands and other aquatic resources play in protecting Montana’s water quality in education, training, and technical assistance being offered to resource professionals and local government entities.



*Livestock impacts to wetlands and riparian areas can reduce water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, especially for vulnerable wetlands.*  
Photo: Keif Storrar





*Federal farm subsidies and other farm payment programs have supported conversion of native prairie to crop land, with related wetland impacts, including drainage. Over 6,600 acres of native prairie in Montana's Prairie Pothole Region were plowed for the first time in 2007.*  
Photos: Ducks Unlimited

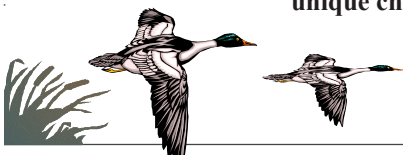


### ***Strategic Direction #7: Public Policy***

**The MWC will track, assess, and inform state and national public policy proposals, decisions (legislative, administrative, and judicial), and actions that impact wetland and riparian area management, protection, and restoration in Montana.**

*Wetland and riparian area management, protection, and restoration is increasingly complex on all fronts: legal, social, ecological, and economic. In addition, management and protection of these areas is challenging because a majority of Montana's wetlands and riparian areas are on private land. Proposed policy, guidance, rules, court decisions, and new programs potentially affecting wetlands and riparian resources emerge continuously at the national and state levels. The range of potential actions on wetlands and riparian areas is broad, including such diverse policy issues as Clean Water Act reforms, Farm Bill legislation, the Army Corps of Engineers mitigation program, land-use development projects, conservation easement policy, land acquisition policy, water rights regulations, energy development policy, and many other issues. MWC has a responsibility to track and assess scientific information, management recommendations, and policy analysis on national and state actions that could affect wetland and riparian area conservation and restoration, and seek solutions to these challenges by informing Council participants and decision-makers.*

**Ideal Outcome: National and state policy (legislative, administrative, and judicial) protects and conserves Montana's wetlands and riparian areas, recognizing the unique challenges of an arid, rural state with rapidly developing urban areas.**

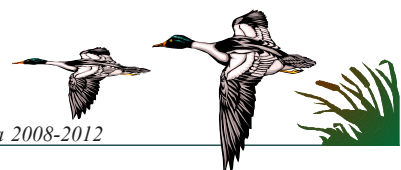


*Priceless Resources:*

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To achieve this outcome, Montana Wetland Council participants will:

- A. Evaluate existing and proposed national and state policies, statutes, guidance, rules, planning processes, and programs that impact Montana's wetland and riparian ecosystem conservation, restoration, mitigation, and functions. Comment on and take other appropriate actions regarding those policies that have the greatest impact on Montana's wetland and riparian resources, and our vulnerable aquatic resources at greatest risk. When most effective, partner with organizations and agencies to achieve this.
- B. Act as a key information source to Montana's congressional delegation about wetland and riparian area conservation and restoration needs. Provide analyses on pending federal actions (such as NAWCA, Farm Bill, COE/EPA mitigation rule, CWA reauthorization) that identify how these actions could affect Montana.
- C. Refine and update Montana's water quality standards to explicitly identify wetlands as state waters that are protected by Montana's water quality standards.
- D. Encourage participation and provide available funding to MWC participants on major state, regional, and national boards and councils such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service's State Technical Committee, the Governor's Task Force on Riparian Protection, the Army Corps of Engineers' mitigation committees, the three Montana Joint Ventures, and the Association of State Wetland Managers. Propose, support, and respond to actions that further wetland and riparian area conservation and restoration in Montana.
- E. Integrate wetland and riparian area conservation, management, and restoration into local, state, tribal, and federal watershed planning and assessment programs and processes.
- F. Work closely with government agencies and organizations to develop and implement a new model for energy development that is proactive and protects natural aquatic ecosystems and their functions, particularly in eastern Montana. Focus on developing conservation and upfront restoration strategies for wetland and riparian areas and their associated upland habitat.





*Healthy grasslands are an integral part of healthy wetlands and provide secure nesting cover for upland nesting ducks.*

Photo: Ducks Unlimited



### ***Strategic Direction #8: Montana Wetland Council Effectiveness***

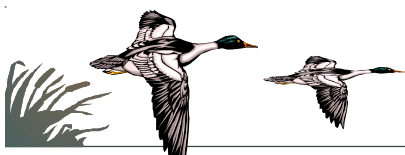
**The MWC will create a more formal and effective organizational structure for the Montana Wetland Council, and obtain stable funding.**

*Wetland and riparian area conservation and restoration challenges have increased over the last decade, outgrowing the existing Montana Wetland Council's ability to effectively respond to those challenges and proactively create solutions. We need a new structure to implement our new strategic directions. A new structure involving a steering committee and working groups will propel the Council to become an effective action-oriented network and information resource. Its value will be generated by the collective efforts of all participants in advancing wetland and riparian protection and restoration through their respective agencies and organizations, as individual landowners and citizens, and collaboratively as the Montana Wetland Council. To effectively implement our new strategic plan, the MWC will employ a structure that creates a governing steering committee, as well as active and involved working groups. MWC will need more stable funding to successfully implement this strategic plan.*

**Ideal Outcome: The Montana Wetland Council is an effective, action-oriented network of over 1,000 agencies, organizations, and individuals concerned about and working for the protection and restoration of Montana's wetland and riparian resources. The MWC provides the statewide focus, leadership, technical information, and coordination to accomplish this critical work.**

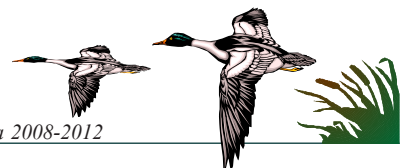
To achieve this outcome, Montana Wetland Council participants will:

- A. Develop, implement, monitor, and update (as appropriate) the Montana Wetland Council's strategic framework and annual work plans so that it continues to focus and articulate the Council's priorities and areas of leadership. See Section VII for schedule and tasks.



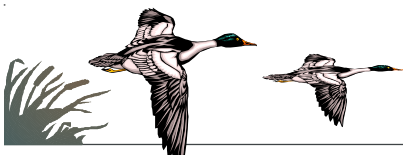
*Priceless Resources:*

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- B. Restructure the Council to more effectively galvanize and coordinate the energy, knowledge, and resources of its participants, and work as an action-oriented network. This will be accomplished in three steps:
1. A steering committee of up to eight members will guide the MWC. The committee will have representation from each of the working groups and other “at large” members. The first steering committee will develop a document that defines its roles and responsibilities and job descriptions for its members. The steering committee will meet at least three times per year; additional meetings may be called if needed and appropriate. The DEQ Wetland Program Manager will staff the steering committee and assist in its development.
  2. Working groups will organize to plan, coordinate, and implement an annual program of tasks based on projects identified in the Ideal Outcome sections of this STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (see Section VI). The working groups will have a five- to six-member core who commit to serve for two-year terms, and others who participate on coordinated projects or provide input and assistance. Startup of work groups will be staggered over the next few years based on interest and need. The working groups will meet at least three times per year in conjunction with the Wetland Council meetings, and by conference call as needed and appropriate. Each working group will receive staff support from DEQ or another MWC partner organization, such as an EPA/DEQ wetland contractor. The initial working groups will include:
    - ✓ Public Education & Professional Training (relies on a scientific advisory team)
    - ✓ Mapping (includes the Montana Land Information Advisory Council wetland work group)
    - ✓ Assessment & Monitoring
    - ✓ Restoration (includes the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership)
    - ✓ Local Government
    - ✓ Vulnerable Wetlands and Public Policy
  3. Specific activities and funding opportunities needed to realize the ideal outcomes and strategic directions described in this STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK will be developed and described in annual work plans. Time and energy by Council participants will be essential to successfully implement annual work plans.



- 
- C. Identify diverse funding sources and encourage Council participants to incorporate MWC's ideal outcomes into their agencies' and organizations' program of work. DEQ will continue to administer the EPA Wetland Program Development Grants to MWC participants and others as an important avenue to fund and implement projects and programs described in this STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK. DEQ will search for funding to establish a "resource fund" that can reimburse working groups and steering committee members for their direct costs (travel, phone calls, etc.) of participating in this new MWC structure.
  - D. Urge DEQ to secure funding in the state budget for Montana Wetland Program staff and wetland program implementation.

*Beavers, nature's dam builders, create wetlands and help to hold water longer on the landscape which provide habitat for other wildlife and critical water storage in the arid West.*  
Photo: Montana Natural Heritage Program





## VI. Core Elements: Who Does What, and Why

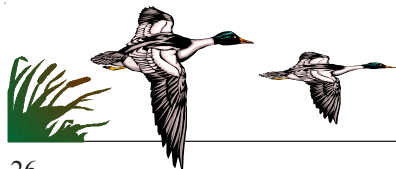
EPA provides grant funding for states to develop and refine effective, comprehensive wetland programs. This matrix identifies which ideal outcomes of Montana's strategic plan meet the basic and core elements of EPA's comprehensive state wetland program. It also identifies the Working Group (WG) charged with developing annual work plans to achieve each ideal outcome.

| Montana Strategic Framework Ideal Outcome                         | EPA Comprehensive Wetland Program Elements |           |            |                        |             |                         |              |              |
|---|--|-----------|------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|
|   | Education/ Outreach                        | Watershed | Regulation | Monitoring/ Assessment | Restoration | Water Quality Standards | Partnerships | Coordination |
| <b>Public Education &amp; Professional Training Working Group</b> |  |           |            |                        |             |                         |              |              |
| 1A – Information Campaign   | X  | X         | X          | X                      | X           |                         | X            |              |
| 1B – Clearinghouse  | X  |           |            |                        |             |                         |              | X            |
| 1C – Education Specialist   | X  | X         |            |                        |             |                         |              |              |
| 1D – Science Advisory   | X  | X         |            |                        |             |                         |              | X            |
| 2A – Workshops  | X  | X         | X          | X                      | X           |                         | X            | X            |
| 2B – Professional Development                                     | X  | X         | X          | X                      | X           |                         | X            | X            |
| 2C – Technical Assistance to Professionals                        | X  |           |            | X                      |             |                         |              | X            |
| <b>Mapping Working Group</b>                                      |  |           |            |                        |             |                         |              |              |
| 3A – Mapping Center   |  |           |            | X                      |             |                         |              | X            |
| 3B – Track Wetland Loss/Gain                                      |  |           | X          | X                      | X           |                         |              |              |
| 3C – Floodplain Mapping   |  |           |            | X                      | X           |                         |              | X            |
| 2C – Technical Assistance to Professionals                        | X  |           |            | X                      |             |                         |              | X            |



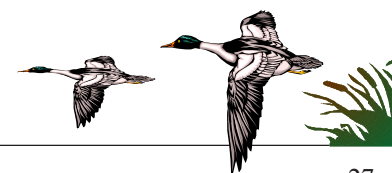
## VI. Core Elements: Who Does What, and Why – continued

| Montana Strategic Framework Ideal Outcome  | EPA Comprehensive Wetland Program Elements |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
|--|--|-----------|------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
|  | Education/<br>Outreach                     | Watershed | Regulation | Monitoring/<br>Assessment | Restoration | Water<br>Quality<br>Standards | Partnerships | Coordination |
| <b>Assessment &amp; Monitoring WG</b>      |  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 3D – Reference Network                     |  |           |            | X                         |             |                               |              | X            |
| 3E – Assessment & Monitoring Program       |  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 3F – Climate Change Impacts                |  |           |            | X                         | X           |                               |              |              |
| 2C – Technical Assistance to Professionals | X  |           |            | X                         |             |                               |              | X            |
| <b>Restoration Working Group</b>           |  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 4A – Legacy Development                    | X  | X         |            |                           | X           |                               | X            | X            |
| 4B – Additional Restoration                | X  |           |            |                           | X           |                               | X            |              |
| 4C – Document Protection                   |  |           |            | X                         | X           |                               |              |              |
| 4D – Evaluate Success                      |  |           |            | X                         | X           |                               |              |              |
| 4E – Restoration Handbook                  | X  |           |            |                           | X           |                               |              |              |
| <b>Local Government Working Group</b>      |  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 5A – Model Regulations                     | X  |           | X          |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 5B – Incentives                            |  |           | X          |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 5C – Assess Effectiveness                  |  |           | X          | X                         |             |                               |              |              |
| 5D – Training/Technical Assistance         | X  |           | X          |                           |             |                               |              | X            |
| 5E – Coordination                          |  | X         |            |                           | X           |                               |              | X            |
| 5F – Financial Support                     |  |           |            |                           | X           |                               |              | X            |



## VI. Core Elements: Who Does What, and Why – continued

| Montana Strategic Framework Ideal Outcome  | EPA Comprehensive Wetland Program Elements |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
|--|--|-----------|------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
|  | Education/<br>Outreach                     | Watershed | Regulation | Monitoring/<br>Assessment | Restoration | Water<br>Quality<br>Standards | Partnerships | Coordination |
| <b>Vulnerable Wetland/Public Policy WG</b> |  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 6A– Vulnerable Wetlands White Paper        | X  |           | X          |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 6B– Montana Solution                       |  |           | X          |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 6C– Clean Water Act                        |  |           | X          |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 6D– Collaborate on Outreach                | X  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              | X            |
| 6E– Water Quality Role                     | X  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 7A– Evaluate Policies/Programs             |  | X         |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 7B– Inform Congressional Delegation        | X  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 7C– Water Quality Standards                |  |           |            |                           |             | X                             |              |              |
| 7D– Participate on Boards/Councils         | X  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              | X            |
| 7E– Integrate with Watershed Plans         |  | X         |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 7F– Energy Development Model               |  | X         |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| <b>MWC Steering Committee</b>              |  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 2D– National/Regional Conference           | X  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              | X            |
| 8A– Monitor/update Strategic Framework     |  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              | X            |
| 8B– Steering Committee & WG                | X  | X         |            |                           |             |                               |              |              |
| 8C– Grant Administration/Resource Fund     |  |           |            |                           |             |                               | X            | X            |
| 8D– State Funding                          |  |           |            |                           |             |                               |              | X            |





*Montana's wetlands, rivers, and lakes provide important habitat for migrating waterfowl and other birds, as well as breeding and wintering habitat. Freezout Lake.*

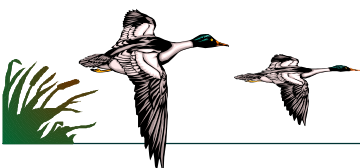
Photo: Dan Casey



## *VII. Strategic Framework: Monitor and Update*

**R**egularly scheduled monitoring, evaluation, and course correction will ensure that the Montana Wetland Council's STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK remains an action-oriented document for sound decision-making. A good process allows all involved to continue to assess the external environment, learn from action, discuss options, and make better decisions. The following steps constitute a suggested planning and monitoring cycle.

- Step 1:** (January 1, 2008) Actions outlined in the STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK become the foundation for the Montana Wetland Council's work over the next five years.
- Step 2:** (Each January/February, 2008–2012) Cooperating closely with the existing working groups and the DEQ Wetlands Program Manager, the Council Steering Committee prepares an annual work plan based on the goals and objectives in the STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK.
- Step 3:** (Each December, 2008–2012) The Montana Wetland Council Steering Committee holds a meeting or extended conference call with working group chairs/co-chairs to assess the Council's progress on its annual work plans and strategic plan.



*Priceless Resources:*

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The assessment will discuss questions such as:

- ✔ Which ideal outcomes and major activities are we accomplishing?  
What difference has it made?
- ✔ Which objectives are we not getting to or making headway on?  
Where are the gaps? Why?
- ✔ How has our external environment changed over the course of  
this year?
- ✔ How has our internal environment changed over the course of  
this year?
- ✔ How has our budget compared with our actual expenditures and  
our desired activities?
- ✔ What new opportunities or threats are present, and how should we  
respond to them?
- ✔ What have we learned from doing our work?
- ✔ What changes or course corrections do we need to make to the  
strategic and/or annual plan? Why?

**Step 4:** A summary of the discussion and any recommendations for course correction will be discussed with the working groups and the Steering Committee, and presented and discussed annually at a full Montana Wetland Council meeting. The STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK and annual plans will be altered accordingly.



*In celebrating Earth Day 2006, community members and volunteers gathered at Teller Wildlife Refuge near Corvallis to plant willows around a newly restored wetland.*

Photo: Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership



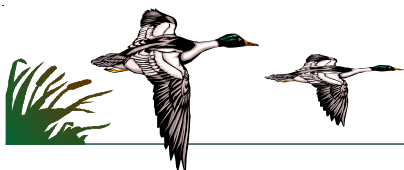
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# Appendix A

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

### *Methodology and Participants*

| Step #  | Date               | Activity   |
|---------|--------------------|--|
| Step #1 | 11/06              | Decide to plan, and hire a strategic planning consultant.  |
| Step #2 | 12/06              | Create a Strategic Planning Team (SPT) of 8 members, each with significant experience and knowledge of different wetland issues, to lead the process.  |
| Step #3 | 12/06 – early 1/07 | Assess the accomplishments, gaps, and lessons learned while implementing the previous 10-year strategic plan. SPT members interview leaders in their topic areas, for presentation to the Montana Wetlands Council.  |
| Step #4 | 1/7/07             | Launch the strategic planning process at the Montana Wetlands Council. (The full-day meeting engaged over 75 members in assessing the former plan, and identifying future challenges and opportunities that will impact wetlands conservation in Montana.)                                   |
| Step #5 | 2/7/07             | SPT meets to design the data gathering and planning processes.   |
| Step #6 | 2/07–3/07          | Develop media releases that publicize the planning effort, the planning leadership, and how Montanans can have a voice in the planning process. DEQ staff contacts other key state government officials, including the governor’s office, to inform them of the planning effort and process. |
| Step #7 | 2/07–4/07          | Data are gathered from Montanans interested in wetlands through three methodologies: telephone interviews, e-mail surveys, and advertisement outreach to farmers and ranchers, particularly in eastern Montana. Identify other studies and speakers to inform the retreat planning process.  |
| Step #8 | 5/2–3/07           | Hold the 2-day strategic planning retreat. Engage about 25 key stakeholders to create a rough outline of a strategic framework for wetlands conservation and restoration in Montana.   |





| Step #   | Date           | Activity  |
|----------|----------------|---|
| Step #9  | 5/07– mid 8/07 | DEQ staff and the planning consultant draft the STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK. The Strategic Planning Team is consulted with review drafts, and Strategic Planning Retreat participants review and comment.   |
| Step #10 | 9/13/07        | Draft FRAMEWORK is distributed electronically to Council e-mail list and reviewed and discussed at the Montana Wetlands Council (MWC) meeting.  |
| Step #11 | 10/2/07        | The SPT, advised by the MWC comments, revises the FRAMEWORK.  |
| Step #12 | 10/07–12/07    | STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK is finalized and a marketing, publicity, and distribution plan developed and implemented. Tools to engage potential users are designed.   |
| Step #13 | 11/07–12/07    | Final draft is discussed with other agencies and organizations that have wetland conservation interests. Discuss avenues for program intersection, integration, and coordination that can help ensure implementation of the strategic plan. |
| Step #14 | 11/07–12/07    | Recruit Steering Committee and Working Group participants and chairs/co-chairs.   |
| Step #15 | 1/08 –12/12    | Strategic plan is implemented. It is monitored and updated annually by the MWC, for action beginning January 2008, to ensure it remains a useful document that guides our action.   |

### ***Strategic Planning Team***

The following individuals participated on the Strategic Planning Team to help with outreach and develop the STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

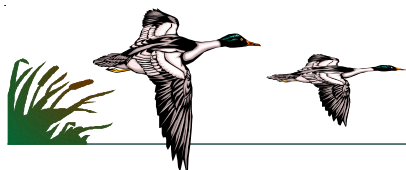
|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Lynn Bacon                | Wetland Scientist PBS&J                       |
| Deb Fassnacht             | Watershed Education Network                   |
| Courtney Frost            | DEQ Wetland Geodatabase Coordinator           |
| Tom Hinz                  | MT Wetlands Legacy Coordinator                |
| Bonnie Lovelace/Jeff Ryan | DEQ Water Protection Bureau                   |
| Pam Mavrolas              | Strategic Planning Consultant                 |
| Joe Meek                  | DEQ Source Water Section Supervisor           |
| Lynda Saul                | DEQ Wetland Program Manager                   |
| Linda Vance               | MT Natural Heritage Program Wetland Ecologist |



### ***Stakeholders Interviewed by Telephone***

The Strategic Planning Team conducted telephone interviews with the following 29 stakeholders. Criteria for selecting this group of stakeholders were: (1) they represented a geographic spread around the state, (2) they represent organizations with an interest in wetlands and riparian areas, (3) these individuals and organizations would most likely not come to a Montana Wetlands Council meeting to express their views and perspectives, and (4) they were willing to participate in an interview.

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Candi Beaudry     | Vice President, Billings-Yellowstone County Planning and<br>Community Services Dept.                               |
| Verna Billedeaux  | MSU Extension, Browning, MT  |
| Joe Brenneman     | Flathead County Commissioner   |
| Sara Carlson      | Montana Association Conservation Districts   |
| Tammy Crone       | Water Quality Specialist, Gallatin Local Water Quality District  |
| Victoria Drummond | President of MT Association of Planners  |
| Kevin Germain     | Director of Planning, Moonlight Basin  |
| Les Gilman        | President, Owner/Operator: Gilman IH Cattle Co. and<br>Agricultural Specialist, Member: Ranch Resources, LLC       |
| Cary Hegreberg    | Executive Director, Montana Contractor's Association   |
| Dave Johnson      | Partner, Real Estate Broker, Hall & Hall   |
| Rick Larson       | Butte Silverbow Water Quality District   |
| Layna Lyons       | Executive Director, Bitterroot Valley Board of Realtors  |
| Marko Manoukian   | Extension Agent, County Director, Phillips County<br>(Agriculture and Range Management)                            |
| Buzz Mattelin     | President, MT Association Conservation Districts   |
| Bill Milton       | Mid-Musselshell watershed group  |
| Jeff Mosley       | Extension Range Specialist, Dept. of Animal and Range<br>Sciences, MSU   |
| Peter Nielson     | Missoula Water Quality District  |
| Glenn Oppel       | Government Affairs Director, Montana Association of<br>REALTORS®   |
| Duncan Patten     | Big Sky Institute, Montana State University  |
| Tim Ranf          | Engineer, Pioneer Technical (Kalispell)  |
| Duane Richards    | Cattle and sheep rancher, Carter County  |
| Byron Roberts     | Executive Director, Montana Building Industry Association  |
| Steve Schmitz     | Bureau Chief, DNRC Conservation Districts Bureau   |
| Trudy Laas Skari  | Farmer/Rancher/Artist, Chester, MT (wheat, cattle, horses)<br>Former county supervisor, candidate for state senate |
| Starr Sullivan    | Superintendent, Wastewater Division, Missoula  |
| Dale Tribby       | BLM, Wildlife Biologist, Miles City  |
| Terry Turner      | Hill County Mosquito Control District Supervisor   |
| Cherri Weyrauch   | Dawson County Mosquito Control District Supervisor   |
| Steve White       | Gallatin County Commissioner   |



### ***Wetland and Riparian Leaders***

The following individuals participated in a 2-day retreat focused on developing the STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Lynn Bacon            | PBS&J Consulting                           |
| Gail Bissell          | FWP Headquarters Region 1                  |
| Jennifer Boyer        | Sonoran Institute                          |
| Tammy Crone           | Gallatin Local Water Quality District      |
| Janet Ellis           | Montana Audubon                            |
| Deb Fassnacht         | Watershed Education Network                |
| Sean Fields           | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service             |
| Courtney Frost        | DEQ Wetland Program                        |
| Frances Graham        | Montana Watercourse                        |
| Laura Hendrix         | Ravalli County Floodplain Administrator    |
| Tom Hinz              | Montana Wetlands Legacy                    |
| Michelle Hutchins     | Missoula City-County Health Dept.          |
| Bonnie Lovelace       | DEQ Permitting and Compliance              |
| Mary Manning          | U.S. Forest Service Northern Region        |
| Pam Mavrolas          | Strategic Planning Consultant              |
| Joe Meek              | DEQ Source Water Protection                |
| Carrie Mosley         | U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service |
| Mike Philbin          | USDI Bureau of Land Management             |
| Jim Robinson          | MT Dept. Natural Resources Conservation    |
| Jerry Rodriguez       | Medicine Lake NWR                          |
| Bob Sanders           | Ducks Unlimited                            |
| Lynda Saul            | DEQ Wetland Program                        |
| Todd Teegarden        | DEQ Technical and Financial Assistance     |
| Todd Tillinger        | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers               |
| Larry Urban           | MT Department of Transportation            |
| Linda Vance           | Montana Natural Heritage Program           |
| Mary Clare Weatherwax | Blackfeet Tribe                            |
| Debbie Zarnt          | Montana Watercourse                        |



*Montana has lost about one third of its natural wetlands since settlement, leaving less than 1% of Montana's landmass in wetland habitat.*

Photo: Jim Stutzman, USFWS







*Governor Schweitzer discussing the O'Dell Creek wetland and riparian restoration project with Jeff Laszlo from the Granger Ranches, Ennis.*

Photo: Andrew Laszlo

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*To request copies please contact:*

Wetland Program, Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
P. O. Box 200901 (1520 East Sixth Avenue)  
Helena, MT 59620-0901  
Phone: (406) 444-6652



*If, as widely predicted, climate change results in an increasingly variable climate with more frequent and severe droughts in Montana, then protecting wetlands that hold and slowly release water to downstream users will be increasingly important for maintaining wildlife habitat, and for providing the water that supports local and regional economies.*

Photo: Lynda Saul

*Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness – to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk...*

*– Henry David Thoreau, WALDEN (1854)*



*Common loons nest on large lakes west of the divide, preferring clean water quality and natural shorelines. Their numbers are decreasing due to land-use impacts. Recognized as a symbol of wildness with their eerie calls, keeping common loons common in Montana will rely on the awareness and involvement of Montanans to protect wetland and riparian habitats.*

Photo: Bob Martinka

*A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a connection of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.*

– Aldo Leopold, *A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC* (1949)